



**Colorado River
Water
Conservation
District Ballot
Measure Feasibility
Survey**

February 15, 2019

Methodology

New Bridge Strategy conducted a survey among N=500 District residents on behalf of the Colorado River Water Conservation District from February 7-11, 2019.

Interviews were conducted among residents who are likely to weigh in on a potential funding proposal based on past participation in similar elections. The sample was drawn proportionally from the following Colorado counties that are part of the Colorado River Water Conservation District.

N=250 interviews were conducted online, N=150 were conducted on landline phones and N=100 were conducted on cell phones. The overall margin of error is $\pm 4.4\%$.

Few respondents believe there is enough water to meet the needs of this part of Colorado over the next ten years.



21%

**say that the region has an
adequate supply of water to
meet the needs of residents**

Based on what you have seen, read or heard, would you say that this part of Colorado does or does not have an ADEQUATE supply of water to meet our needs over the next ten years?

Six-in-ten have a favorable view of the Colorado River Water Conservation District. 68% of these respondents were able to rate their opinion of the District.



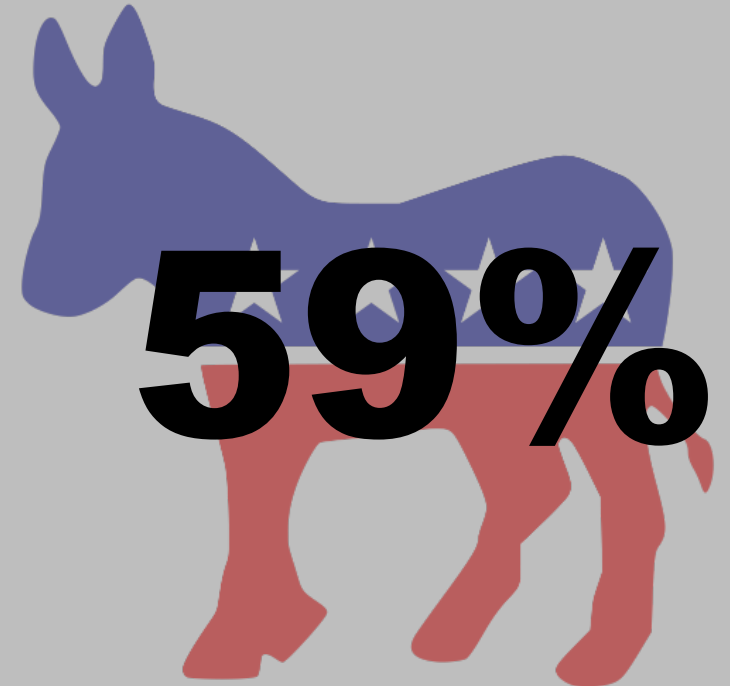
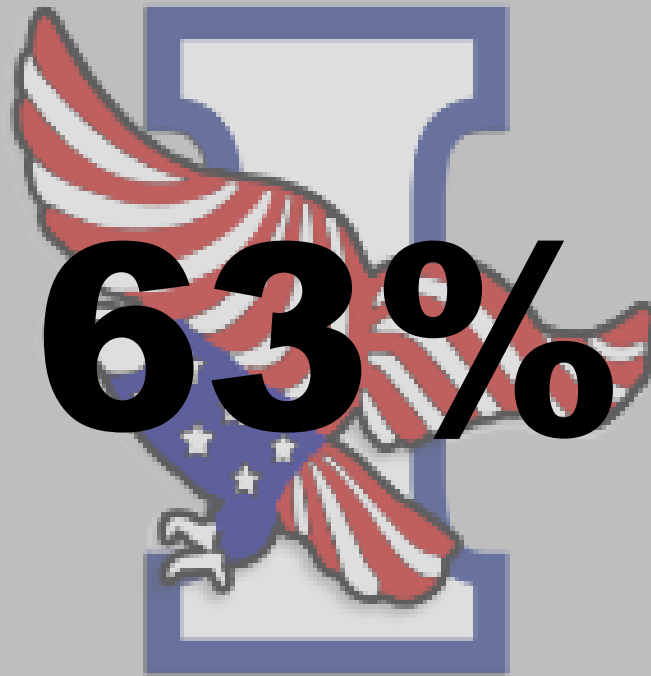
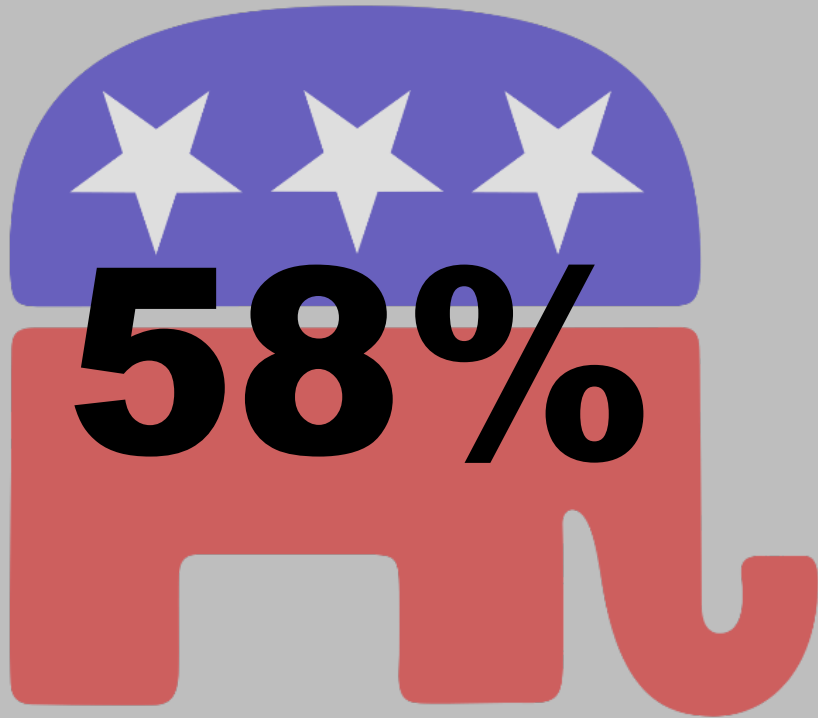
Very Favorable 24%

Total Favorable 60%

Now I'm going to read you the names of a few local entities here in Colorado. Please tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each one. If you have never heard of one, please just say so.

The District is viewed favorably across the political spectrum.

% Total Favorable



Now I'm going to read you the names of a few local entities here in Colorado. Please tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each one. If you have never heard of one, please just say so.

These respondents are more intensely favorable towards the District than their county governments or the Colorado state government.

<i>Ranked by % Very Favorable</i>	Very Favorable	Total Favorable
Colorado River Water Conservation District	24%	60%
Your county government	15%	69%
Colorado state government	13%	56%



Now I'm going to read you the names of a few local entities here in Colorado. Please tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each one. If you have never heard of one, please just say so.

Respondents read/were read the following ballot language.

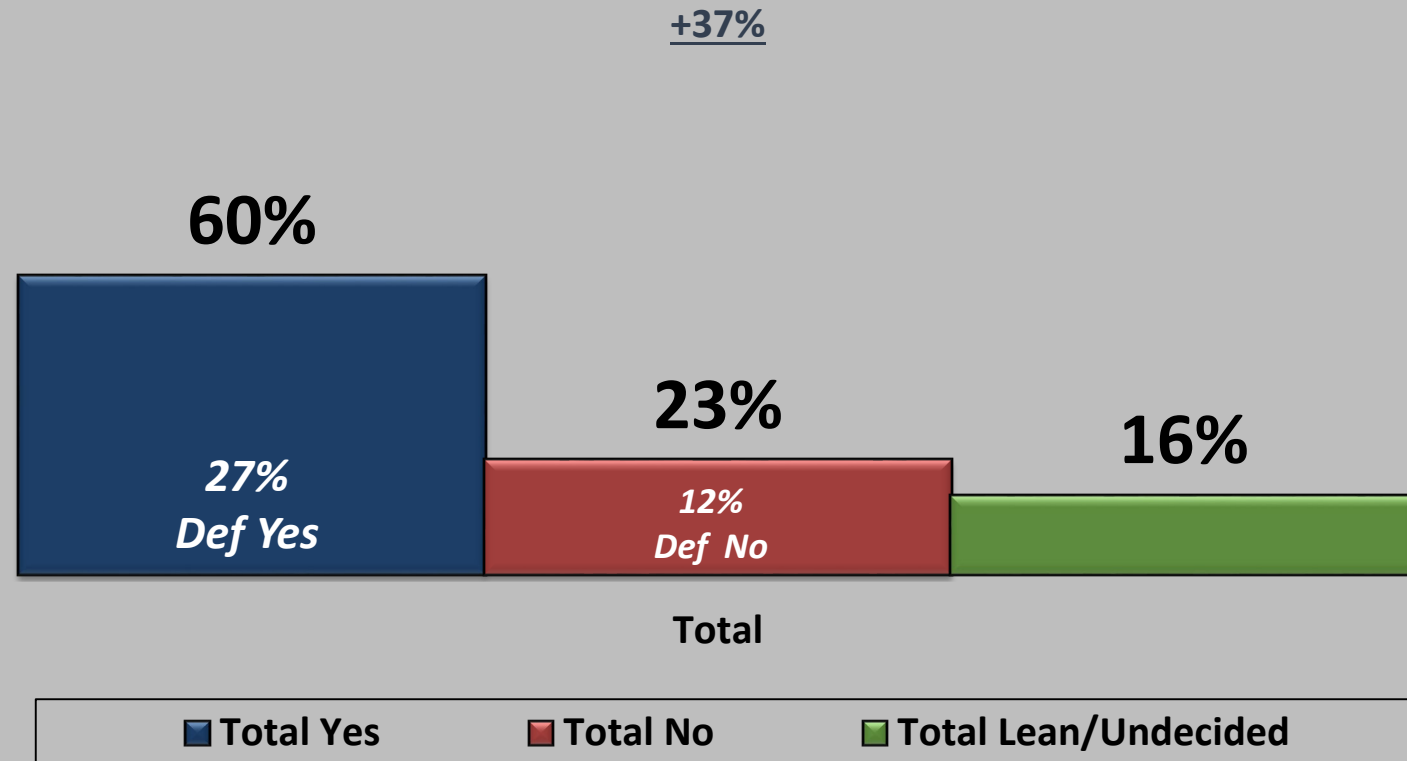
If the election were being held today, would you vote “yes” or “no” on the following question...

Without raising additional tax revenues in the year in which the mill levy is adjusted and in order to allow the Colorado River Water Conservation District to protect and safeguard Western Colorado water such as...

*Continuing to legally fight to keep river water for use on the Western Slope;
Ensuring adequate water supplies for farmers and ranchers in order to sustain local food production;
Ensuring adequate drinking water supplies for Western Colorado communities; and
Protecting fish and wildlife through maintaining river levels and water quality.*

shall the District’s local board have authority to adjust the district’s mill levy solely for the purpose of maintaining revenues that would be lost due to statewide property tax assessment rate reductions, so long as independently audited financial reports are published annually, and shall the revenues generated by any such mill levy increase be collected, retained and spent notwithstanding any limits provided by law?

A majority said they would vote yes on the proposal, with more than one-in-four saying they would definitely vote yes.



And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

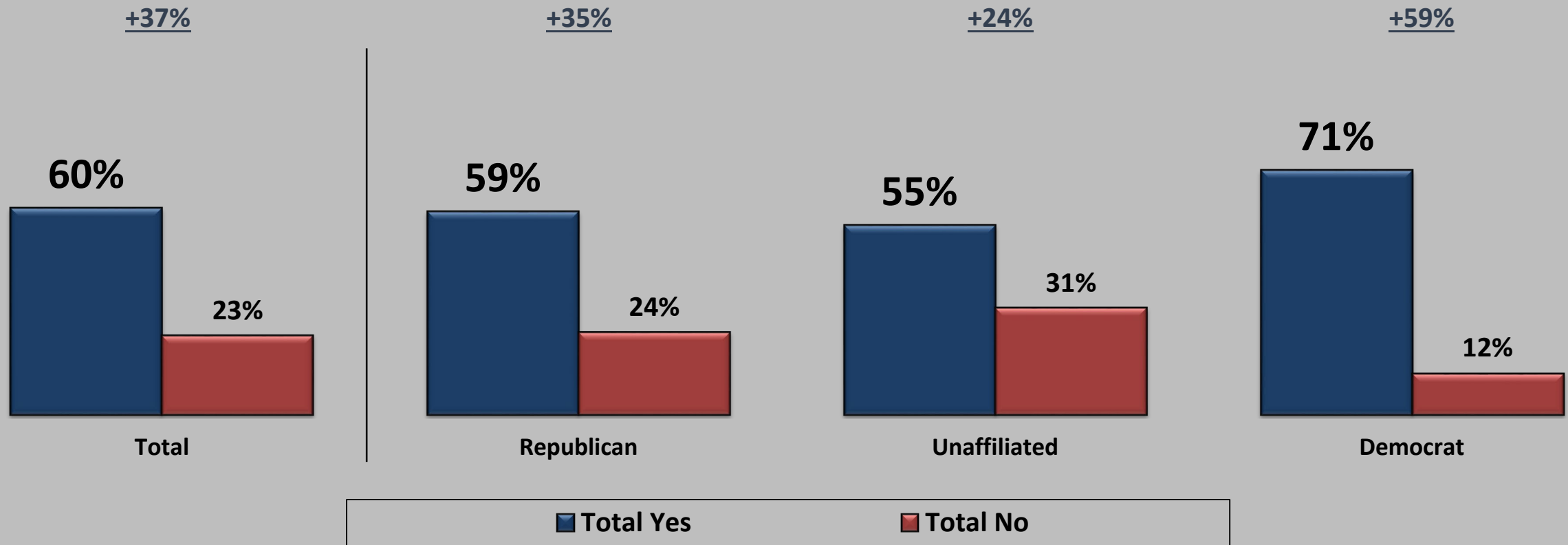
Reasons respondents said they would **vote YES** on the proposal.

- Keep Western Slope water on Western Slope
- Protect/Preserve water resources (in general)
- Maintain/protect rights to Western Slope water
- Adequate water supply necessary for Western Slope - livelihood
- Worry about adequate water for agriculture
- Protect/Preserve Western Slope water resources
- Like local control/use
- Western Slope needs to protect itself from Eastern Slope growth & development
- Support local farmers/ranchers
- Won't increase taxes
- Policies for resources should not be dictated by Eastern Slope
- Need it for habitat/wildlife
- Need it for recreation
- Water resources should be managed properly

Reasons respondents said they would **vote NO** on the proposal.

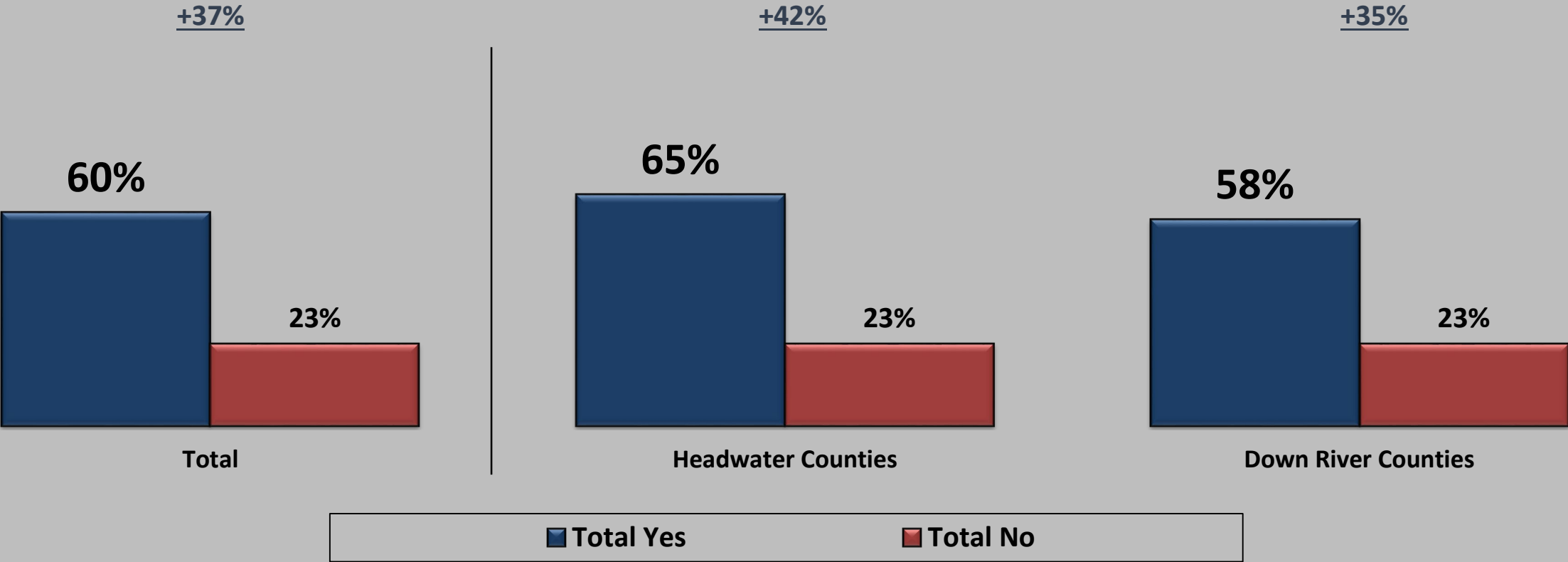
- No new taxes/want to lower my taxes
- Mill levies should be voted on
- The board/organization should not have this authority
- Taxes are already not being spent correctly/efficiently
- Need more information
- Might be TABOR violation
- Doesn't specify what will happen in the future
- Wording not specific enough
- Too much government involvement
- Don't like local government
- Commercial property owners disproportionately taxed

The proposal receives majority support across the political spectrum, although Democrats are most likely to vote yes...



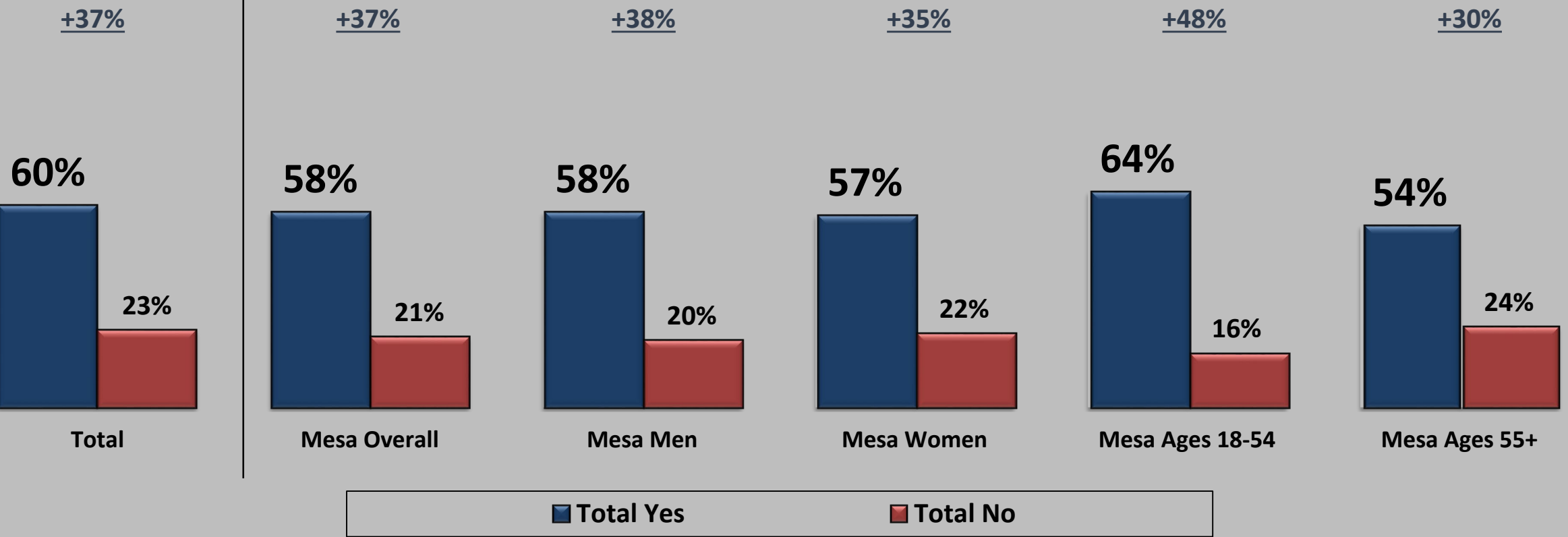
And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

...As are those who reside in the headwater counties.



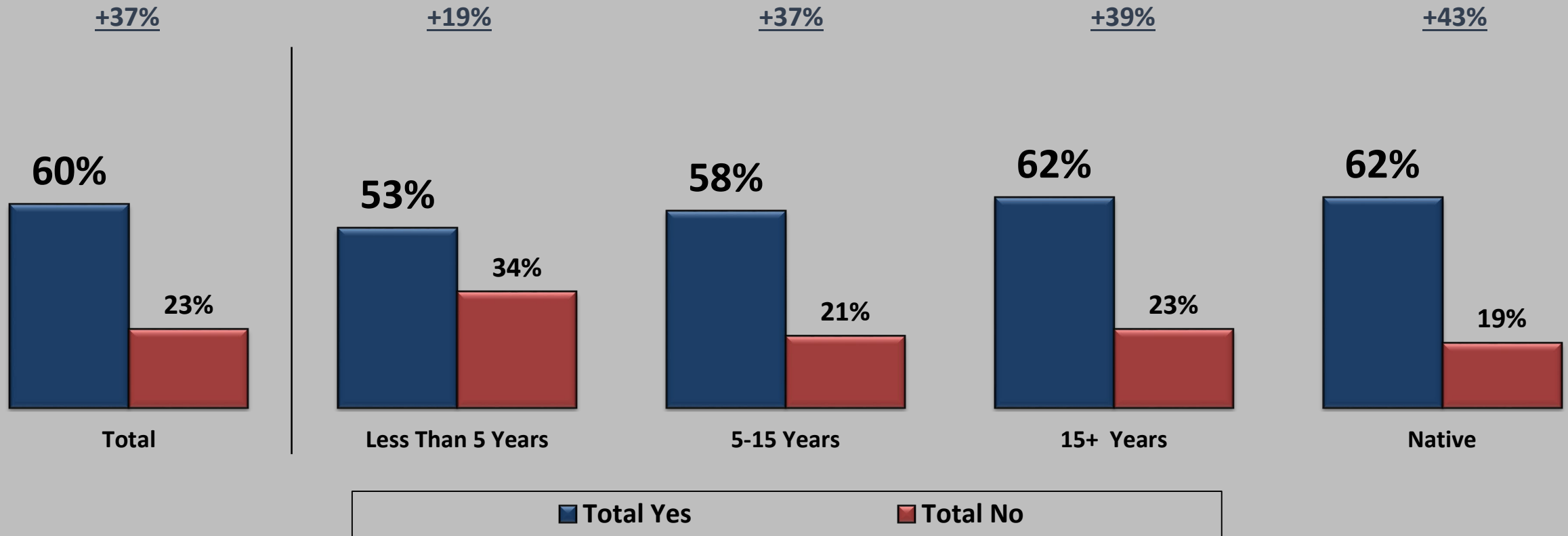
And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

Support is significant in Mesa County, particularly among younger residents.



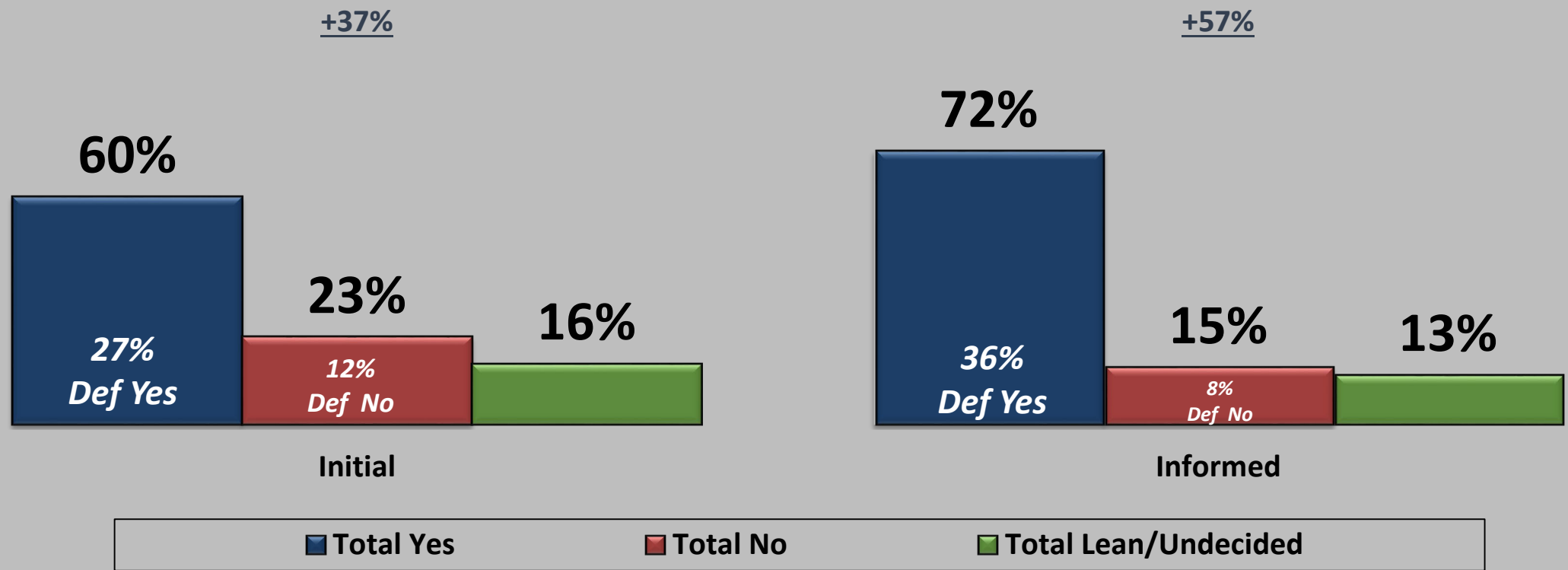
And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

Those who have lived in this region for more than five years are also more willing to lend their support.



And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

When told that approval of the measure is NOT a tax increase and just ensures that District revenues do not decrease in the future, support for the proposal increases dramatically.



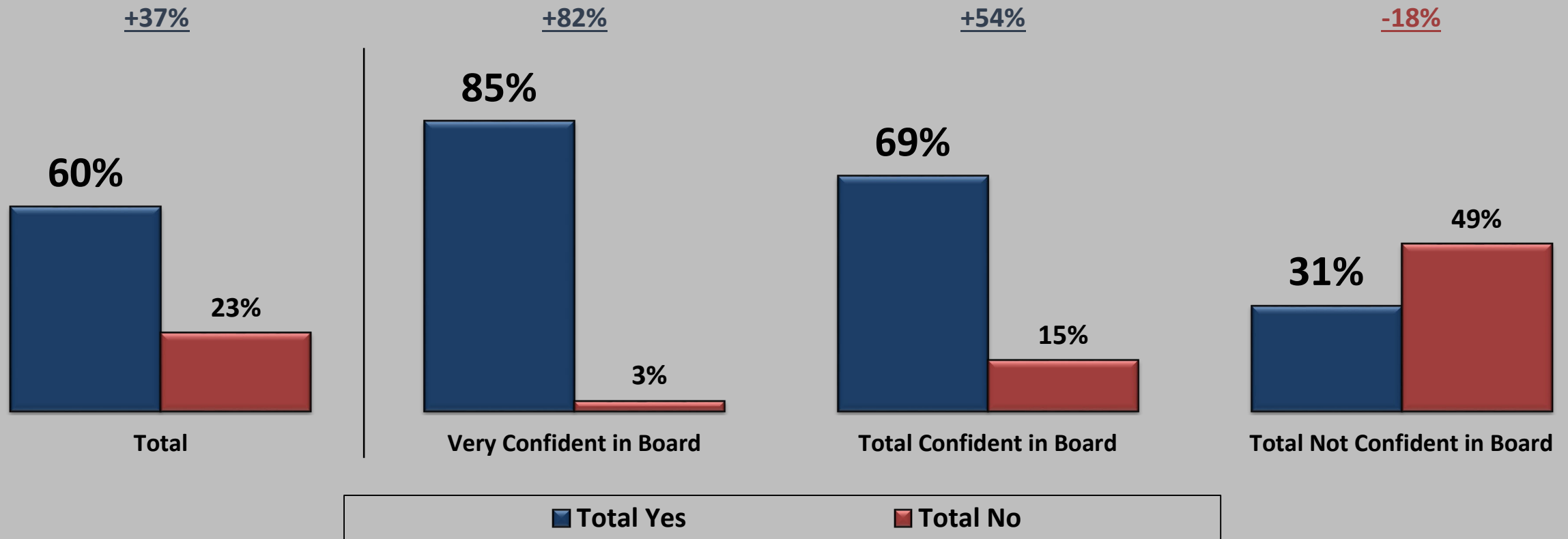
If voters approve this measure it would NOT increase tax revenues to the District but would simply allow the River District to ensure that their revenues do not DECREASE in the future if property tax assessment rates decline. Knowing that, would you then vote Yes in support of this proposal or vote No against it?

Almost three out of four respondents are confident that the board of Colorado River Water Conservation District handles taxpayer money wisely.

Very Confident	12%
Somewhat Confident	60%
Total Confident	72%
Total Not Confident	22%
Not Very Confident	17%
Not At All Confident	5%

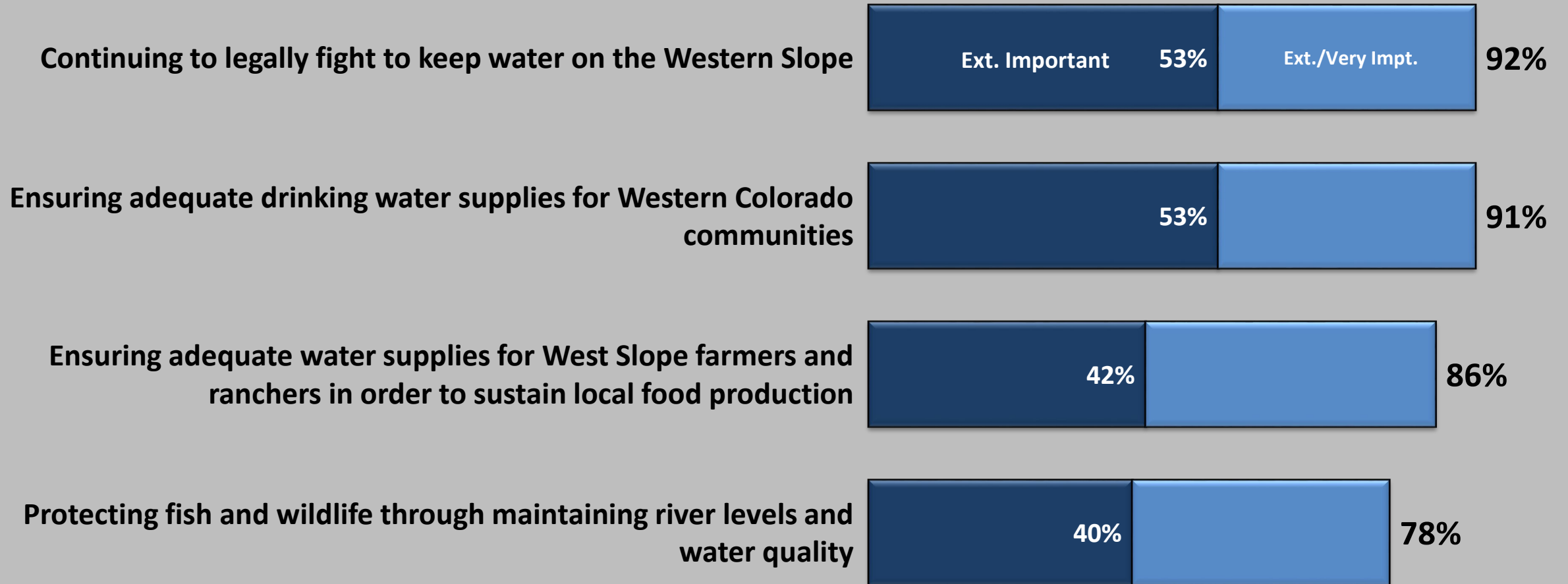
How confident would you say you are that the local board of Colorado River Water Conservation District handles taxpayer money wisely? Would you say you are...

Those who have confidence in the Board are more likely to say they will vote for the measure.



And would you DEFINITELY vote (yes/no) or just PROBABLY vote (yes/no)?

Respondents overwhelmingly say it is extremely or very important to continue to keep West Slope water, for drinking, farming and wildlife.



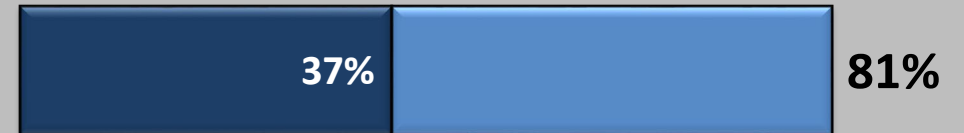
The following is a list of projects that could continue to be funded if voters approve this proposal. Please indicate for each one how important it is to you personally that each project be funded: Is it extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not important to you that funding is dedicated to that purpose?

There is less resonance for maintaining Lake Powell or cloud seeding.

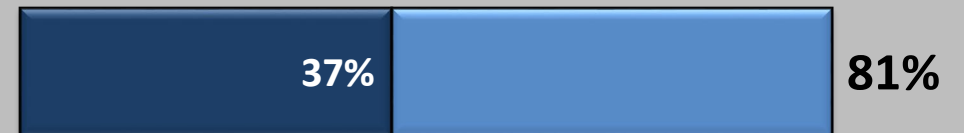
Addressing the increasing unpredictability of water supplies and more severe droughts



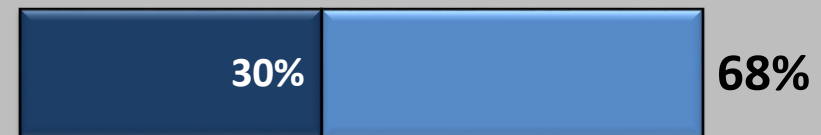
Helping farmers and ranchers modernize irrigation systems to conserve river water



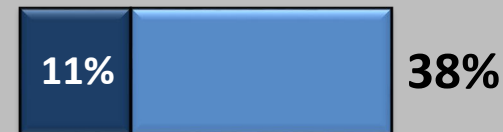
Assisting in efforts to improve forest health to avoid wildfires and ensure water quality in rivers and streams



Working for a water savings plan to maintain reservoir levels in Lake Powell in order to ensure uninterrupted use of water on the west slope



Promoting cloud seeding efforts to provide greater snow pack and increase water levels



The following is a list of projects that could continue to be funded if voters approve this proposal. Please indicate for each one how important it is to you personally that each project be funded: Is it extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not important to you that funding is dedicated to that purpose?

Rationales in favor of the proposal that emphasize the importance of farming and ranching to the Colorado economy are the most convincing.

<i>Ranked by % Very Convincing</i>	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
Farming and ranching is vital to our local economy. They not only feed Colorado and the nation, but provides thousands with jobs. We need the Colorado River District ensuring we keep adequate water in western Colorado, or else we lose those jobs.	57%	85%
Front Range cities are aggressively buying up water rights and drying up valuable, productive farmland. Some of these farms have been in families for generations. The Colorado River District needs these continued resources to help our farmers and ranchers modernize irrigation and keep these farms and ranches in western Colorado.	56%	89%

The following are some reasons why some people say they would vote YES IN FAVOR OF this proposal for the Colorado River District to maintain current revenue levels. Please indicate whether the argument is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing or not at all convincing as a reason to vote YES, IN FAVOR OF this proposal...

A majority or close majority of respondents say they are very convincing rationales as well.

<i>Ranked by % Very Convincing</i>	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
Nothing is more important than having clean water to drink. By protecting the amount of water flowing in our rivers and streams, we can ensure the quality of that water flowing into our water supplies.	50%	84%
Western Colorado's population is growing every day. Mesa County alone is expected to add another 28 thousand people in the next ten years. We need the Colorado River District to help plan better for growth and conserve our sources of water and water quality for our region.	48%	86%
Our water supplies are like a bank account, from which we are withdrawing more than we deposit. The Colorado River District is working to help our communities and agriculture be good stewards of this vital resource so future generations can have adequate water and enjoy our rivers like we do today.	46%	86%
The average home owner pays less than seven dollars per year to fund the Colorado River District. This proposal simply continues to fund the District at current rates.	44%	81%

The following are some reasons why some people say they would vote YES IN FAVOR OF this proposal for the Colorado River District to maintain current revenue levels. Please indicate whether the argument is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing or not at all convincing as a reason to vote YES, IN FAVOR OF this proposal...

Explaining Gallagher is the least compelling rationale in support of the measure that we tested.

<i>Ranked by % Very Convincing</i>	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
The Colorado River District has played a major role in statewide water planning, ensuring that states like Arizona and Nevada are conserving water to keep the Colorado River healthy.	33%	77%
Our communities voted to tax themselves to fund the River District. Yet a technical glitch in state budget rules will take away the level of funding, with District funds expected to decline in the near future. This proposal simply allows the District to maintain current revenues.	32%	76%

The following are some reasons why some people say they would vote YES IN FAVOR OF this proposal for the Colorado River District to maintain current revenue levels. Please indicate whether the argument is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing or not at all convincing as a reason to vote YES, IN FAVOR OF this proposal...

Top Four Messages by Party and Region – Very Convincing

<u>Republican</u>	<u>Unaffiliated</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Headwater Counties</u>	<u>Down river Counties</u>
Farming/Ranching Vital (63%)	Farming/Ranching Vital (59%)	Front range cities drying up valuable farmland (59%)	Front range cities drying up valuable farmland (52%)	Farming/Ranching Vital (60%)
Front range cities drying up valuable farmland (62%)	Nothing more important than clean water to drink (52%)	Population growing every day (57%)	Farming/Ranching Vital (50%)	Front range cities drying up valuable farmland (57%)
Nothing more important than clean water to drink (47%)	Front range cities drying up valuable farmland (47%)	Water supplies are like a bank account (52%)	Nothing more important than clean water to drink (46%)	Nothing more important than clean water to drink (52%)
Water supplies are like a bank account (45%)	Population growing every day (47%)	Nothing more important than clean water to drink (52%)	Average Homeowner pays less than \$7 to fund CO River District (44%)	Population growing every day (51%)

The following are some reasons why some people say they would vote YES IN FAVOR OF this proposal for the Colorado River District to maintain current revenue levels. Please indicate whether the argument is very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing or not at all convincing as a reason to vote YES, IN FAVOR OF this proposal...

Respondents read/were read an opposition argument. More than half did not find this argument convincing.

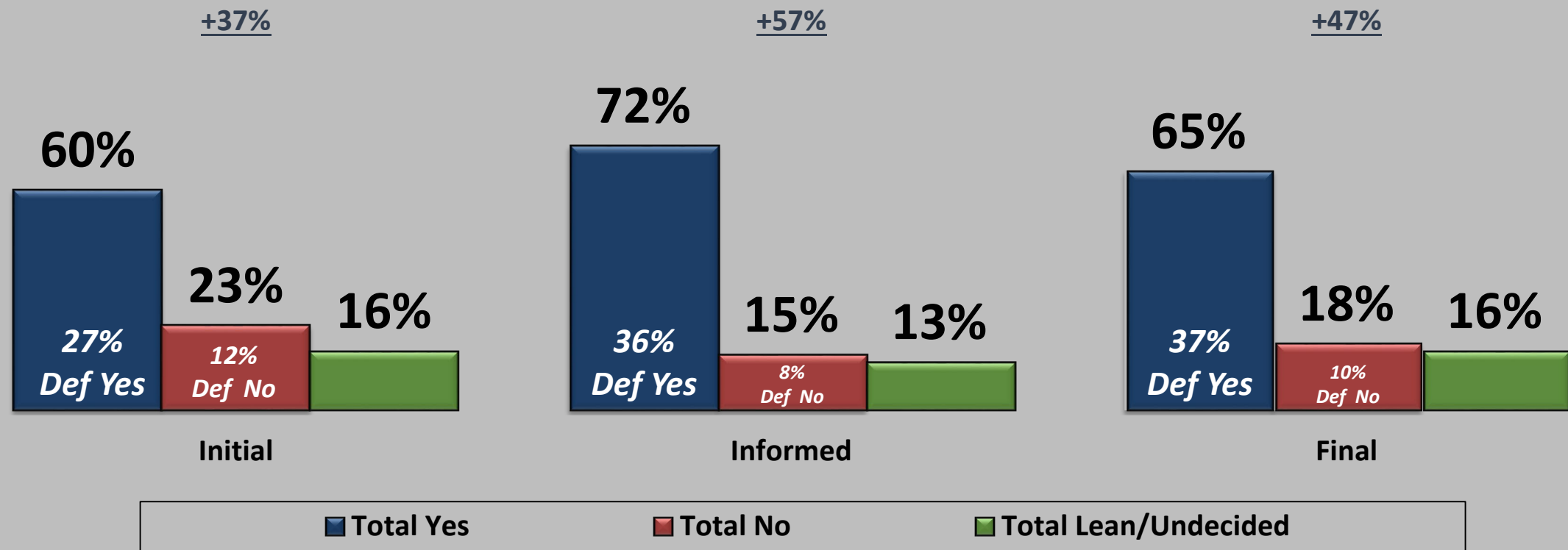
Some people have said we should vote NO against this proposal because housing prices and the cost of living in our communities are increasing, leaving many families struggling. We should not vote for a measure that allows the District to get around the taxpayer bill of rights. How convincing is this as a reason to vote NO against the proposal?

Very Convincing	15%
Somewhat Convincing	28%
Total Convincing	43%
Total Not Convincing	56%
Not Very Convincing	32%
Not At All Convincing	25%

The chart below shows groups that found this rationale against the proposal convincing.

Top Subgroups – Opposition Argument Total Convincing (43%)	
High School or Less	56%
Very Dependent on Farm Economy	51%
Unaffiliated Men	50%
Mesa County	50%
Republicans	48%
Some College	48%
Men Ages 18-54	47%

On the final ballot, there is a net five point increase of those saying they would vote yes for the proposal, with a net ten point increase of those saying they would definitely vote for the proposal.



If voters approve this measure it would NOT increase tax revenues to the District but would simply allow the River District to ensure that their revenues do not DECREASE in the future if property tax assessment rates decline. Knowing that, would you then vote Yes in support of this proposal or vote No against it?

The Bottom Line

- This is a solid proposal that District residents support. While there are modest distinctions among sub-groups it is widely embraced.
- Residents want to protect Western Slope water for drinking water, for agriculture, and for wildlife. That said, the threat for agriculture and its connection to jobs is most compelling, particularly with those initially less enthusiastic about the proposal.
- The first thing residents need to know is that this proposal is NOT a tax increase, but an attempt to keep funding for the District stable. Explaining Gallagher, however, is not effective.

The Bottom Line

- Criticisms can wither support. Some are very concerned about granting this much authority to the board in principle, and therefore ensuring there will be public input of some form may be helpful.
- It will also be imperative for an eventual campaign to communicate about the measure to avoid confusion and reinforce that this measure seeks to simply continue the good work of the District.



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